

## Notes from Bristol-Plymouth County AgCom Gathering Nov 16, 2011

More than 40 people from 22 different towns drove through the rain to attend the meeting. The gathering was sponsored by the Plymouth County Farm Bureau (thanks to Jim Hayward and the Monponsett Inn staff!), Bristol County Farm Bureau, the Mass Association of Agricultural Commissions (MAAC), the Mass Dept of Agricultural Resources, SEMAP, Mass Audubon, and The Trustees of Reservations. The names and email addresses or phone numbers of attendees are included at the end of these notes.

Towns represented were these:

Carver	Dartmouth	Marshfield
Acushnet	West Bridgewater	Halifax
Easton	Middleboro	Rochester
Seekonk	Kingston	East Bridgewater
Raynham	Duxbury	Plympton
Rehoboth	Berkley	Bridgewater
Swansea	Westport	Boxford
Lancaster		

Mass Audubon land preservation discussion. Priscilla Chapman of the Mass Audubon Society ([pchapman@massaudubon.org](mailto:pchapman@massaudubon.org)) presented information about loss of farmland in this region from Mass Audubon's *Losing Ground* report and about the importance of agricultural land to declining species of grassland birds. Both Mass Audubon and AgComs have been very much involved in farmland preservation. There are now 148 AgComs in Massachusetts, with more anticipated by next year. Mass Audubon partners regularly with other groups who are involved with farmland protection, and has been highly supportive of Ag Commissions.

Mass Association of Agricultural Commissions (MAAC). Chair Dick Ward described the MAAC, which started a year ago and works to coordinate and facilitate communication among the 148 AgComs. The MAAC has one board member from each of the 14 counties. Each AgCom should take a vote to join the MAAC and inform Dick Ward of its vote ([rjward7@verizon.net](mailto:rjward7@verizon.net)). Fifty-four AgComs have joined so far. Dues are free. The 2012 annual meeting of the MAAC will be held on Friday, Feb 24, at the Sturbridge Host. AgCom members are welcome but should pre-register with Dick Ward or Sue Guiducci. The statewide AgCom website is [www.massagcom.org](http://www.massagcom.org). Additional information is available from the MDAR website, [www.mass.gov/agr/](http://www.mass.gov/agr/).

The Trustees of Reservations and Land Protection Resources: 1) Community Preservation Act. Kelley Whitmore ([kwhitmore@ttor.org](mailto:kwhitmore@ttor.org)) of The Trustees of Reservations discussed the Community Preservation Act (CPA) and its role in helping preserve farmland at the local level. Contact Kelley Whitmore or Kim Gilman ([kim.gilman@tpl.org](mailto:kim.gilman@tpl.org)) if you would like to learn more about CPA adoption in your community. Go to [www.communitypreservation.org](http://www.communitypreservation.org) for more information. 2) Land Protection. Kelley also said that staff at local land trusts are available if you or someone you know is interested in exploring conservation options for property. Land protection staff are familiar with the funding sources and tax benefits related to conserving land. Contact Kelley if you'd like the name of a land protection specialist in your area.

Farm to School Project. Simca Horwitz ([simca@massfarmtoschool.org](mailto:simca@massfarmtoschool.org)) discussed the Farm to School Project, which has helped 60 percent of the state's public schools purchase local farm produce. Many towns have passed local purchasing resolutions, and model language is available from Simca and others. The statewide Farm to School conference will be held on March 15. The website for the project is [www.mass.gov/agr/markets/Farm to School](http://www.mass.gov/agr/markets/Farm_to_School).

## Roundtable Discussion – Reports from Individual AgComs

- Dartmouth: has passed a Right to Farm Bylaw, now working to adjust to a new town administrator, has sponsored town Right to Farm signs. The Dartmouth AgCom was established in 1987; local cable TV station has included programs on local chefs. Sue Guiducci emphasized “don’t let your guard down” – keep working with other boards so they know you’re out there, keeping your connections active.
- Duxbury: the Duxbury Conservation Commission has been quite supportive of the AgCom. The AgCom has a website, has produced fliers on town farms, has sponsored a vote to establish the CPA in Duxbury, has sponsored a Right to Farm Bylaw, works on land preservation, is coping with dog issues, and is involved in field rehabilitation and a possible lease of the Bay Farm property.
- Rehoboth: is working to address zoning issues around a proposed solar installation.
- Marshfield: AgCom was formed in 2006. Sponsors 36 community garden plots (they ask for donations to cover costs), has put out Right to Farm brochures and a publication on Living Near a Farm (passed the hat for contributions to cover costs), has had no conflict situations to deal with, is building outreach by sponsoring a series on healthy agriculture (2012 series to include chicken raising, pruning, goats and sheep), is putting in a request to the CPA Committee for funds to help with deer fencing for community gardens, sends reminders to Chap. 61A owners to reapply each fall.
- Plympton: has an active AgCom.
- Middleboro: is “rebuilding” by getting new members and establishing a bond with other departments, recently passed the CPA, working on 61A issues.
- Kingston: the AgCom started around gravel-removal issues, have horse people on board but have recently lost some farms in the flower business, has sponsored agricultural fairs for backyard farmers with good publicity, K-9s, and homemade ice cream (but cost \$500 for police detail), and have mailed out brochures.
- East Bridgewater: has passed Right to Farm, sponsors road signs (through the town DPW) for each farm business (each farm pays \$90 for its signs), has produced farm pamphlets, has gotten in as part of the Selectmen’s budget, working on CPA and a farm map.
- Westport: has prepared a town farm brochure, suggested thinking creatively about who can serve on local AgCom (i.e. have Trustees of Reservations staff on the commission), reviews the town’s 61a release requests, maintains a list of farms and works with the Board of Health to address farm complaints.
- West Bridgewater: passed the CPA and used CPA funds to complete an APR purchase; is still in the beginning stages; Julie Amaral is also on the Open Space Committee.
- Rochester: no appointments to the AgCom have been made yet but they are working on getting them done; no Right to Farm yet; attempted to pass CPA 5 years ago; completed the purchase of the \$2 million Eastover Farm.
- Boxford (north shore): has worked on getting the Board of Health to recognize and understand farm issues, especially regarding stable permitting; has sponsored a cable TV series to promote farming, including items like small gardening, beekeeping; AgCom meetings are televised.
- Carver: sponsors a farmers market and has a town cranberry bog. Dick Ward is also chair of the Mass Association of Agricultural Commissions.

Towns that have not yet established an AgCom: Voting to establish an AgCom puts farming on the map in your town, keeps you from being invisible, gives you an official place at the table along with other boards in discussions about important town issues, and makes you part of a network of nearly 150 AgComs around the state. For assistance in starting an AgCom, call Pete Westover, MDAR Contractor, 413-665-4077, [westover03@comcast.net](mailto:westover03@comcast.net); Cheryl Lekstrom, MDAR Contractor and Mass Farm Bureau Federation Membership Director, [cheryl@mfbf.net](mailto:cheryl@mfbf.net); or Dick Ward or Sue Guiducci of the MAAC Board. Also talk to your neighboring towns that have already established AgComs – they should be glad to assist with your effort.